

down the avenue that led to the little door, arm in arm, and so absorbed in each other that for a minute they did not see that she was standing in the way. It was a chance. If it had not happened then, it would have happened at some other time and place.

Rhoda had waited until the service was over, and in so doing she had come upon the last person whom she wished to see just then. There stood Dolly by the summer-house, with a pale face, confronting her, with the little ragged crew about her knees. Mikey, looking up, thought that for once "Miss Vamper" was in the tantrums.

Rhoda started back instinctively, meeting two blank wondering eyes, and would have pulled George away, but it was too late.

"Nonsense," said George; and he came forward, and then they all were quite silent for a minute, George a little in advance, Rhoda lingering still.

"What does this mean?" said Dolly, coldly, speaking at last.

"What does it mean?" George burst out. "Don't you see us? don't you guess? It is good news, isn't it? Dolly, she loves me. Have you not guessed it all along—ever since—months ago?"

He was half distracted, half excited, half laughing. His eyes were dim with moisture. Any one might see him. What did he care for the ragged children, the people passing by—those silent crowds that flit through our lives? He came up to Dolly.

"You will be tender to her, won't you, and help her, for my sake, and you will be our friend, Dolly? We had not meant to tell you yet; but you wish us joy, won't you, dear?"

"Tender to her? Help her? What help could she want?" thought Dolly, looking at Rhoda, who stood silent still, but who made a little dumb movement of entreaty. "Was it George who was asking her to befriend him? Was it George who had mistrusted her all this long time, and kept her in ignorance?"

"Why don't you answer? Why do you look like that? Do you wonder that I or that any body else should love her?" he went on, eagerly.

"What do you want me to do?" Dolly asked. "I can not understand it."

Her voice sounded hard and constrained: she was hurt and bewildered.

George was bitterly disappointed. Her coldness shocked him. Could it be possible that Rhoda was right, and Dolly hard and unfeeling?

Poor Dolly! A bitter wave of feeling seemed suddenly to rise from her heart and choke her as she stood there. "So! there was an understanding between them? Did he come to see Rhoda in secret, while she was counting the days till they should meet? Was it only by chance that she was to learn

their engagement? They had been stopping up the way; as they moved a little aside to let the people pass, Rhoda timidly laid one hand on Dolly's arm. "Won't you forgive me? won't you keep our secret?" she said.

"Why should there be any secret?" cried Dolly, haughtily. "How could I keep one from Aunt Sarah? I am not used to such manoeuvrings."

Rhoda began to cry. George, exasperated by Dolly's manner, burst out with, "Tell her, then! Tell them all—tell them every thing! Tell them of my debts! Part us!" he said. "You will make your profit by it, no doubt, and Rhoda, poor child, will be sacrificed." He felt he was wrong, but this made him only the more bitter. He turned away from Dolly, and pulled Rhoda's hand through his arm.

"I will take care of you, darling," he said.

"George! George!" from poor Dolly, sick and chilled.

"Dolly!" cried another voice, from without the gate. It was John Morgan's. He had missed her, and was retracing his steps to find her.

Poor weak-minded Dolly! now brought to the trial and found wanting: how could she withstand those she loved? All her life long it was so with her. As George turned away from her, her heart went after him.

"Oh, George! don't look at me so. My profit! You have made it impossible for me to speak," she faltered, as she moved away to meet the curate and Frank Raban.

"What is the matter? are you ill?" said John Morgan, meeting Dorothea in the doorway. "Why did you wait behind?"

"Mikey detained me. I am quite well, thank you," said Dolly, slowly, with a changed face.

Raban gave her a curious look. He had seen some one disappear into the summer-house, and he thought he recognized the stumpy figure.

John Morgan noticed nothing; he walked on, talking of the serious aspect things were taking in the East—of Dr. Thompson's gout—of the church-rates. Frank Raban looked at Dolly once or twice, and slackened his steps to hers. They left her at the corner of her lane.

## CHAPTER XX.

### RHODA TO DOLLY.

DOLLY heard the luncheon-bell ringing as she walked slowly homeward. It seemed to her as if she had been hearing a story which had been told her before, with words that she remembered now, though she had listened once without attaching any meaning to them. Now she seemed to awake and understand it all—a hundred little

things, unnoticed at the time, crowded back into her mind, and seemed to lead up to this moment. Dolly suddenly remembered Rhoda's odd knowledge of George's doings, her blushes, his constant comings of late: she remembered every thing, even to the gloves lying by the piano. The girl was bitterly hurt, wounded, impatient. Love had never entered into her calculations, except as a joke or a far-away impossibility. It was no such very terrible secret, after all, that a young man and a young woman should have taken a fancy to each other; but Dolly, whose faults were the faults of inexperience and youthful dominion and confidence, blamed passionately as she would have sympathized. Then in a breath she blamed herself.

How often it happens that people meaning well as Dolly did undoubtedly slide into some wrong groove from the overbalance of some one or other quality! Dolly cared too much and not too little, and that was what made her so harsh to George; and then, as if to atone for her harshness, too yielding to his wish—to Rhoda's wish working by so powerful a lever.

Lady Sarah came home late for luncheon, and went up to her room soon after. Dolly gave Frank Raban's message. She herself stopped at home all day expecting George, but no George came—not even Rhoda, whom she both longed and hated to see again. Every one seemed changed to Dolly; she felt as if she was wandering lost in the familiar rooms, as if George and her aunt and Rhoda were all different people since the morning.

"Why are you looking at me, child?" said Lady Sarah, suddenly. Dolly had been wistfully scanning the familiar lines of the well-known face; there was now a secret between them, thought the girl.

Mr. Raban came in the afternoon as he had announced, and Dolly, going into the oak-room, found him there, standing in the shadow, with a bundle of papers under his arm, and looking more like a lawyer's clerk than a friend who had been working hard in their service.

Dolly was leaving the room again, when her aunt called her back for a minute.

"Did George tell you any thing of his difficulties the last time he was in town?" Lady Sarah asked from her chimney-corner. "When was it you saw him, Dolly?"

She was nervously tying some papers together that slipped out of her hands and fell upon the floor. Poor Dolly turned away, and there they lay; Dolly did not attempt to pick them up. There was a minute's silence.

Dolly flushed crimson. "I—I don't—I can't tell you," she said, confusedly.

She saw Frank Raban's look of surprise as she turned away. What did she care what he thought of her? What was it to

him if she chose to tell a lie and he guessed it? Oh, George! cruel boy! what had he asked?

Frank Raban wondered at Dolly's silence. Since she wished to keep a secret, he did not choose to interfere; but he blamed her for that, as for most other things; and yet the more he blamed her, the more her face haunted him. Those girl's eyes, with their gray lights and clouds; that sweet face, that looked so stern and yet so tender too. When he was away from her he loved her; when he was with her he accused her.

It was a long, endless day. Miss Moineaux was welcome at tea-time, with her flannel bindings and fluttering gossip. It seemed like a little bit of commonplace, familiar every-day coming in. Dolly went to the door with her when she left them, and saw black trees swaying, winds chasing across the dreary sky, light clouds sailing by. The winds rose that night, beating about the house. A chimney-pot fell crashing to the ground; elm branches broke off from the trees and were scattered along the parks. Dolly, in her little room, lay listening to the sobs and moans without, to the fierce hands beating and struggling with her window. She fell into a sleep, in which it seemed to her that she was railing and raving at George again: she awoke with a start to find that it was the wind. She dreamed the history of the day over and over. She dreamed of Raban, and somehow he always looked at her reproachfully. She awoke very early in the morning, long before it was time to get up, with penitent, loving words on her lips. Had she been harsh to George? Jealous—was she jealous? Dolly scorned to be jealous, she told herself. It was her hatred of wrong, her sense of justice, that made her heart so bitter. Poor Dolly had yet to discover how far she fell short of her own ideal. My poor little heroine was as yet on the eve of her long and lonely expedition in life. There might be arid places waiting for her, dreary passes, but there were also cool waters and green pastures along the road. Nor had she yet journeyed from their shade, and from the sound of her companions' voices and the shelter of their protection.

This was Rhoda's explanation. She was standing before Dolly, looking prettier than ever. She held a flower in her hand, which she had offered her friend, who silently rejected it. Rhoda had looked for Dolly in vain in the house. She found her at last, disconsolately throwing crumbs to the fishes in the pond. Dolly stood sulky and miserable, scarcely looking up when Rhoda spoke. They were safe in the garden out of reach of the quiet old guardians of the house. Rhoda began at once.

"He urged it," said Rhoda, fixing her great dark eyes steadily upon Dolly; "indeed he did. I said no at first; I would not



even let him be bound. One day I was weak and consented to be engaged. I sinned against my own conscience; I am chastised."

"Sinned," said Dolly, impatiently; "chastised. Rhoda, Rhoda, you use long words that mean nothing. Oh! why did you not tell Aunt Sarah from the beginning? She loves George so dearly—so dearly that she would have done any thing, consented to every thing, and this wretchedness would have been spared. How shall I tell her? How shall I ever tell her? I can't keep such a secret. Already I have had to tell a lie."

"I could not bear to be the means of injuring him," Rhoda said, flushing up. "I dare say you won't understand me or believe me, but it is true. Indeed, indeed, it is true, Dolly. Lady Sarah would never forgive him now if he were to marry me. She does not like me. Dolly, you know it. I have been culpably foolish; but I will not damage his future."

"Of course it is foolish to be engaged," said Dolly; "but there are worse things, Rhoda, a thousand times."

"Yes," said Rhoda. "Dolly, you don't know half. He has been gambling—dear, foolish boy—borrowing money from the Jews. Uncle John heard of it through a pupil of his. He wrote to Mr. Raban. Oh, Dolly, I love him so dearly that it breaks my heart. How can I trust him? How can I? Oh! how difficult it is to be good, and to know what one should do!"

Rhoda flung herself down upon the wooden bench as she spoke, leaning her head against the low brick wall, with its ivy sprays. Dolly stood beside her, erect, indignant, half softened by the girl's passion and half hardened when she thought of the deception that she had kept up. Beyond the low ivy wall was the lane of which I have spoken, where some people were strolling; overhead the sky was burning deep, the afternoon shadows came trembling and shimmering into the pond. Lady Sarah had had a screen of creepers put up to shelter her favorite seat from the winds; the great leaves were still hanging to the trellis, gold and brown.

"If I thought only of myself, should I not have told every body?" said Rhoda, excitedly, and she clasped her hands; "but I feel there is a higher duty to him. I will be his good angel and urge him to work. I will leave him if I stand in his way, and keep to him if it is for good. Do you think I want to be a cause of trouble between him and Lady Sarah? She might disinherit him. It is you she cares for, and not poor George; I heard Mr. Raban say so only yesterday," cried Rhoda, in a sudden burst of tears. "He told me so."

Dolly waited for a moment, and then slowly turned away, leaving Rhoda still

sobbing against the bricks. She couldn't forgive her at that instant; her heart was bitter against her. What had she done to deserve such taunts? Why had Rhoda come making dissension and unhappiness between them? It was hard, oh, it was hard. There came a jangling burst of music from the church-bells, as if to add to her bewilderment.

"Dear Rhoda," said Dolly, coming back, and melting suddenly, "do listen to me. Tell them all. I can not see one reason against it."

"Except that we are no longer engaged," said Rhoda, gravely. "I have set him free, Dolly; that is what I wanted to tell you. I wrote to him, and set him free; for any thing underhand is as painful to me as to you. It was only to please George I consented. Hush! They are calling me."

Engaged or not, poor Dorothea felt that all pleasure in her friend's company was gone: there was a tacit jar between them—a little rift. Dolly for the first time watched Rhoda with critical eyes, as she walked away down the path that led to the house, fresh and trim in her pretty dress and her black silk mantelet, and with her flower in her hand. Dolly did not follow her. She thought over every single little bit of her life after Rhoda had left her, as she sat there alone, curled up on the wooden seat, with her limp violet dress in crumpled folds, and her brown hair falling loose, with pretty little twirls and wavings. Her gray eyes were somewhat sad and dim from the day's emotion. No, she must not tell her aunt what had happened until she had George's leave. She would see him soon; she would beg his pardon; she would *make* him tell Aunt Sarah. She had been too hasty. She had spoken harshly, only it was difficult not to be harsh to Rhoda, who was so cold—who seemed as if she would not understand. All she said sounded so good, and yet, somehow, it did not come right. Dear George, dear, wicked boy, what had he been doing? Then she began to wonder if it could be that Rhoda loved him more than Dolly imagined. Some new glimmer had come to the girl of late—not of what love was, but of what it might be. Only Dolly was fresh and prim and shy, as girls are, and she put the thought far away from her. Love! Love was up in the stars, she thought, hastily. All the same, she could not bring herself to feel cordially to Rhoda. There was something miserably uncomfortable in the new relations between them; and Dolly showed it in her manner plainly enough.

Lady Sarah told Dolly that afternoon that she had written to George to come up at the end of the week. "He has had no pity on us, Dolly," she said. "I have some money that a friend paid back, and with that and the price of a field at Bartlemere I shall be

able to pay for his pastimes during the last year."

"Aunt Sarah," said Dolly, suddenly illuminated, "can't you take some of my money? Do, please, dearest Aunt Sarah."

"What would be the use of that?" said Lady Sarah. "I want the interest for your expenses, Dolly." She spoke quite sharply, as if in pain, and she put her hand to her side and went away. If Lady Sarah had not been ill herself and preoccupied, she might have felt that something also ailed Dolly, that the girl was constrained at times, and unlike herself. Dolly only wondered that her aunt did not guess what was passing before her, so patent did it seem, now that she had the key.

One day Marker persuaded her mistress to go to a doctor. Lady Sarah came back with one of those impossible prescriptions that people give. Avoid all anxiety; do not trouble yourself about any thing; live generously; distract yourself when you can do so without fatigue.

Lady Sarah came home to find a Cambridge letter on the table, containing some old bills of George's which a tradesman had sent on to her, a fresh call from the unlucky bank in which Mr. Francis had invested so much of her money, an appeal from Mikey's fever-stricken cellar, and a foreign scented letter, that troubled her more than all the rest together:

"TRINCOMALEE, September 25, 18—.

"DEAREST SARAH,—I have many and many a time begun to write to you of all, only to destroy bitter records of those sorrows which I must continue to bear alone. Soon we shall be leaving this ill-fated shore, where I have passed so many miserable years gazing with longing eyes at the broad expanse lying so calm and indifferent before me.

"Before long Admiral Palmer sails for England. He gives up his command with great reluctance, and returns *via* the Cape; but I, in my weak state of health, dare risk no longer delay. Friends—kind, good friends, Mrs. and Miss M'Grudder—have offered to accompany me overland, sharing all expenses, and visiting Venice and Titian's—the great master's glorious works—*en route*, to say nothing of Raphael, and Angelo the divine. We shall rest a week at Paris. I feel that after so long a journey utter prostration will succeed to the excitement which carries me through where I see others, more robust than myself, failing on every side. And then I am in rags—a study for Murillo himself! I can not come among you all until my wardrobe is replenished. How I look forward to the time when I shall welcome my Dorothea—ours, I may say—for you have been all but a mother to her. On my return I trust to find some corner to make my nest; and for that purpose I should wish to spend a week or two in London, so as to be within easy reach of all. Sarah, my first husband's sister, will you help me? For the love of 'auld lang syne,' will you spare a little corner in your dear old house? Expensive hotels I can not afford. My dear friends here agree that Admiral Palmer's ungraciously given allowances are beggarly, and unworthy of his high position. How differently dear Stan would have wished him to act! Silver and gold have I none—barely sufficient for my own dress. Those insurances were most unfairly given against the widow and the orphan. Tell my darlings this; tell them, too, that all that I have is theirs. When I think that for the last six years, ever since my second marriage, a tyrant will has prevented me from

folding them to my heart, indignation nearly overcomes the prudence so foreign to my nature. Once more, fond love to you, to my boy, and to *ma fille*, and trusting before long to be once more at home,

"Ever your very affectionate PHILIPPA."  
"P.S.—Since writing the above few lines I find that my husband wishes to compass my death. He again proposes my returning with him by the Cape. Sarah, will you spare me the corner of a garret beneath your roof?"

The letter was scented with some faint delicious perfume. "Here, take it away," says Lady Sarah. "Faugh! Of course she knows very well that she can have the best bedroom, and the dressing-room for her maid; and you, my poor Dolly, will have a little amusement, and some one better fitted to—"

"Don't!" cries Dolly, jumping forward with a kiss.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## CINDERS.

DOLLY went to afternoon church the day George was expected. When she came home she heard that her brother was up stairs, and she hurried along the passage, with a quick-beating heart, and knocked at his door. It was dark in the passage, and Dolly stood listening—a frightened, gray-eyed, pent-up indignation, in a black dress, with her bonnet in her hand. There was a dense cloud of smoke and tobacco in the room when Dolly turned the lock at last, and she could only cough and blink her eyes. As the fumes cleared away she saw that George was sitting by the low wooden fire-place. He had been burning papers. How eagerly the flames leaped and traveled on, in bright blue and golden tongues, while the papers fell away black and crackling and changing to cinder! Dolly looked very pale and unlike herself. George turned with a bright, haggard sort of smile.

"Is that you, Dolly?" he said. "Come in; the illumination is over. You don't mind the smell of tobacco. I have been burning a box of cigars that Robert gave me. He knows no more about cigars than you do."

"Oh, George," cried Dolly. "Is this all you have to say, after making us so unhappy—"

"What do you want me to say?" said George, shrugging his shoulders.

"I want you to say that you have told her every thing, and that there are no more concealments," Dolly cried, getting angry. "Oh, George, when Aunt Sarah asked me about you last, I felt as if it was written in my face that I was lying."

He was going to answer roughly, but he looked up at Dolly's pale, agitated face, and was sorry for her. He spoke both kindly and crossly.



"Don't make such a talk, Dolly, and a fuss. We have had it out—John Morgan—council of state. She has been—she has been" (his voice faltered a little bit) "a great deal kinder than I deserve or had any reason to expect, judging by you, Dolly. It's not your business to scold, you know."

"And she knows all?" said Dolly, eagerly, and brightening.

"She knows all about my debts," said George, expressively. "She is going to let me try once more for the next scholarship. If I had been her, I shouldn't have been so good. She sha'n't be disappointed this time. However, the past is past, and can't be helped. I've been burning a whole drawerful of it....." And he struck his foot into the smouldering heap.

People think that what is destroyed is over, forgetting that what has been is never over, and that it is in vain you burn and scatter the cinders of many a past hope and failure, and of a debt to pay, a promise broken. Debts, promises, failures are there still. There were the poems George had tried to write, the account-books he had not filled up, the lists of books he had not read, a dozen mementoes of good intentions broken. There are the ugly phenixes as well as beautiful ones that rise out of the ashes.

"And did you not tell Aunt Sarah about Rhoda?" repeated Dolly, disappointed. "Oh, George, what does Rhoda mean when she says you are no longer engaged? What does it all mean?"

"It means—it means," said George, impatiently, "that I am an idiot, but I am not a sneak; and if a woman trusts me, I can keep her counsel, so long as you don't betray me, Dolly. Only there are some things one can't do, not even for the woman one loves." Then he looked up suddenly, and seeing Dolly's pained face, he went on. "Dolly, I think you would cut off your head if I were to ask you for it: Rhoda won't snip off one little lock of hair. Poor dear, she is frightened at every shadow. She has given me back this," he said, opening his hand, which he had kept closed before, and showing Dolly a little pearl locket lying in his palm. Then he went on in a low voice, looking into the fire: "I love her enough, God knows, and I would tell the whole world if she would let me. But she says no—always no; and I can trust her, Dolly, for she is nearer heaven than I am. It is her will to be silent," he said, gently: "angels vanish if we would look into their faces too closely. She would like me to have a tranquil spirit, such as her own; she thinks me a thousand times better than I am," said George, "and if I did as she wishes, I could be happy enough, but not contented." Dolly wondered of what he was thinking as he went on pacing up and

down the room. "I can not tell lies to myself, not even for her sake. I can not take this living, as she wishes. If I may not believe in God my own way, I should blaspheme and deny him, while I confessed him in some one else's words. You asked me one day if I had an inner life, Dolly," George said, coming back to the oak chimney-piece again. "Inner life is only one's self and the responsibility of this one life to the Truth. Sometimes I think that before I loved Rhoda I was not all myself, and though the truth was the same, it did not concern me in the same degree, and I meant to do this or that as it might be most advisable. Now, through loving her, Dolly, I seem to have come to something beyond us both, and what is advisable don't seem to matter any more. Can you understand this?"

"Yes, George," said Dolly, looking at him earnestly: his sallow face had flushed up, his closed eyes had opened out. Dolly suddenly flung her arms around his neck and kissed him. She felt proud of her brother as she listened to him. She had come to blame, she remained to bless him. Ah, if every one knew him as well as she did! She was happier than she had been for many a day, and ready to believe that George could not be wrong. She could not even say no that evening after dinner when George proposed that they should go over to the Morgans'.

"Go, my dears," said Lady Sarah; and Dolly got up with a sort of sigh to get her bonnet. Just as they were starting her cousin Robert walked in unexpectedly, and proposed to accompany them. He had come in with a serious face, prepared to sympathize in their family troubles, and to add a few words in season, if desired, for George's benefit. He found the young man looking most provokingly cheerful and at home, Lady Sarah smiling, and if Dolly was depressed she did not show it, for, in truth, her heart was greatly lightened. The three walked off together.

"We shall not be back to tea," said Robert, who always liked to settle things beforehand. But on this occasion Mrs. Morgan's hospitable tea-pot was empty for once. The whole party had gone off to a lecture and dissolving views in the Town-hall. The only person left behind was Tom Morgan, who was sitting in the study reading a novel, with his heels on the chimney-piece when they looked in.

"Good-night, Tom," said Dolly, with more frankness than necessary. "We won't stay, since there is only you."

"Good-evening," said Robert, affably. And they came out into the street again. He went on: "I am sorry John Morgan was not at home. I want him to fix some time for coming down to Cambridge. You must

come with him, Dolly. I think it might amuse you."

"Oh, thank you!" says Dolly, delighted.

This prospect alone would have been enough to make her walk back enjoyable, even if George had not been by her side, if it had not been so lovely a night, if stars had not burned sweet and clear overhead, if soft winds had not been stirring. The place looked transformed, gables and corners standing out in sudden lights. They could see the dim shade of the old church, and a clear green planet flashing with lambent streams beyond the square tower. Then they escaped from the crowd, and turned down by the quiet lane where Church House was standing gabled against the great Orion. They found the door ajar when they reached the ivy gate; the hall door too was wide open, and there seemed to be boxes and some confusion.

"Oh, don't let us go in; come into the garden," said Dolly, running to the little iron garden gate inside the outer wall. There was a strange glimmer behind the gate against which the slim white figure was pushing. The garden was dark, and rustling with a trembling in the branches. A great moon had come up, and was hanging over London, serenely silencing the rooftops and spires. Its light was rippling down the straight walks, of which the gravel was glittering.

"Yes, come," said George; and the three young people flitted along to their usual haunt by the pond.

"What is that?" said Dolly, pointing in the darkness. "Didn't somebody go by?" She was only a girl in her teens, and still afraid of unseen things.

"A rat," cried George, dashing forward.

"Oh, stop!" from Dolly.

"Don't be a goose," said Robert; and as he spoke George met them, flourishing an old garden shawl of Lady Sarah's, which had been forgotten upon the bench. He flung it weirdly down upon the gravel-walk. "Dead for a ducat, dead!" said he. Then he started forward, with a strange moonlight gleam upon his face. "This counselor is now most still, most secret, and most grave," he said, "who was in life a foolish prating knave." His voice thrilled—he got more and more excited.

Robert began to laugh. "What is it that you are acting?" he said.

"Acting?" cried George, opening his eyes. "That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once." "Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' the earth—?"

"Those are his Eton speeches," said Dolly; "but, George, you look terrible. Please don't."

"Do be quiet," said Henley, impatiently. "Is not some one calling?"

Some one was calling, lights were appear-

ing and disappearing, the drawing-room window was wide open, and their aunt stood on the terrace making signs, and looking out for them.

"Look! there goes a falling-star," said George.

"Ah, who is that under the tree?" cried Dolly again, with a little shriek. "I knew I had seen some one move;" and as she spoke a figure emerging from the gloom came nearer and nearer to them, almost running, with two extended arms; a figure in long flowing garments, silver in the moonlight; a woman advancing quicker and quicker.

"Children, children," said a voice, "it is I—George—your mother! Don't you know me—darlings? I have come. I was looking for you. Yes, it is I, your mother, children."

Dolly's heart stood still, and then began to throb, as the lady flung her arms round Robert, who happened to be standing nearest.

"Is this George? I should have known him any where!" she cried.

Was this their mother?—this beautiful, sweet, unseen woman, this pathetic voice!

Dolly had seized George's hand in her agitation, and was crunching it in hers. Robert had managed to extricate himself from the poor lady's agitated clutch.

"Here is George. I am Robert Henley," he said. "But, my dear aunt, why—why did you not write? I should have met you. I—"

It was all a strange confusion of moonlight and bewilderment, and of tears presently, for Mrs. Palmer began to cry and then to laugh, and finally went off into hysterics in her son's arms.

## CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. PALMER.

WHEN they were a little calmed down, when they had left the moon and the stars outside in the garden, and were all standing in a group in the drawing-room round the chair in which Mrs. Palmer had been placed, Dolly saw her mother's face at last. She vaguely remembered her out of the long ago, a very young and beautiful face smiling at her: this face was rounder and fuller than the picture, but more familiar than her remembrance. Mrs. Palmer was a stout and graceful woman, with a sort of undulating motion peculiar to her, and with looks and ways some of which Dolly recognized, though she had forgotten them before. There was a strong likeness to Dolly herself, and even a little bit of George's look when he was pleased, though poor George's thick complexion and snub nose were far, far removed from any likeness to that fair and del-